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PITFALLS FOR COLLECTORS

BEFORE now THE LOTUS has pointed out that the reputable art dealer is the collector's greatest safeguard. But still the inexpert often are foolish enough to trust to their own judgment unsupported—and come a cropper.

When recently William Hewson Baltzell of Wellesley, Mass., brought into this country a "marble temple" to ornament his estate he was fully satisfied that he was getting a genuine antiquity. The United States Court of Customs Appeals held that this temple is not only a sculpture but that it was produced partly by machinery within less than fifty years, and in addition was designedly treated with applications tending to produce a simulated appearance of antiquity, evidently sufficient to mislead the buyer. Instead of being permitted to bring in this "work of art" free of duty Mr. Baltzell will have to pay at the rate of 45 per cent. ad valorem.

The temple was entered at Boston and the customs officials levied duty at the high rate. Protest was filed with the Board of United States General Appraisers. The customs tribunal ruled that while not entitled to free entry as the work of a professional sculptor the article was properly dutiable at the rate of 15 per cent. ad valorem as a "sculpture not specially provided for," thus giving the temple the status of a "work of art."

Assistant Attorney-General Hanson then took the issue to the higher court,

and the opinion of this tribunal, just rendered, reverses the findings of the General Appraisers, proves the temple not to be genuine and fixes duty at the 45 per cent. rate, as originally assessed by the customs collector.

Mr. Hanson said that the court's ruling will affect the tariff classification of a large class of future art importations. It was also generally believed in importing circles that this case may serve as a warning to prospective buyers of "antiquities." While the price paid for this temple is not disclosed, it was said that it had cost thousands of dollars.

The most famous fraud perpetrated on a great institution occurred in the sale of the so-called "Tiara of the Scythian King Saïtapharnes" to the Louvre in 1896. The tiara made its début in Paris in March, 1896, a wonderful golden egg-shaped coiffure, covered with ornaments and figures in relief, and bearing an inscription to the effect that the tiara had been presented about 200 B. C. by the ancient Greek colony of Olbia in the Taurid, to the Scythian King Saïtapharnes, as the price of his protection.

A month previously, in Vienna, the tiara had been entrusted by a Jew from the Crimea, named Hochmann, to two dealers in antiquities who brought it to the Louvre, after first trying to dispose of it in Vienna, where the price was considered prohibitive. It was then offered (by letter) to the British Museum, but Mr. A. S. Murray, at that

time the head of the classical department, replied that no one need trouble to send it over. In Paris, however, the entire body of savants (including the eminent M. Salomon Reinach), who were assembled at the Louvre to examine the proposed object of purchase, were unanimous as to its beauty and value, and 200,000 francs were readily voted for its acquisition. But if the Parisian public remained "more than usual calm" when the tiara was exhibited in the glass case, a wave of astonishment swept over foreign archæologists at the credulity of the French officials, and lurid tales were told as to the date and place of its manufacture.

Correspondence and consternation became general, but the Director of the Hermitage Museum of St. Petersburg, and the greater number of the French experts, put their glasses to their blind eyes—and kept them there for seven years. Then, in 1903, the unexpected happened, for an artist in the suburb of Montmartre claimed to have fashioned the Scythian king's tiara. He had been given, he said, a drawing to copy by M. Spitzer in 1894. A gold leaf weighing 458 golden grains had been used in the production of the tiara; it had taken several months to make, and the price paid was 4500 francs. The artist confessed that, feeling very curious as to its destination, he had marked it in three different places with indelible black spots, and had employed the modern method of soldering the joints.

To be sure, a certain difficulty lay in

the fact that M. Spitzer had died four years before he was said to have ordered the tiara, but who pays attention to such trifles? The tiara occupied the same position in conversation, in journalism, and in caricature as the Humberts and the Druces in their day, and in spite of two letters which appeared immediately after the Montmartre declaration. These letters affirmed that both writers had seen the tiara in process of making in Odessa in 1896, by a man named Rouchomowski. Thanks to the patient investigations of M. Clermont-Ganneau, Member of the Institute and Professor of the Collège de France, Rouchomowski was ultimately proved to be the real delinquent, and the tiara was swiftly and silently withdrawn from the public gaze.

According to Rouchomowski himself, he had no idea that a fraud was intended. Some cheap German illustrations of ancient Greek gold-work had been sent him to copy, at the same time as a set of designs of a late Roman triumph—after Giulio Romano—the whole work being designed as a gift to an aged professor. The Russian worked conscientiously from the models given him, and the experts of France, undeterred by German warnings, took modern copies of late Italian art for Greek work of the second century, B. C.

That seems to be the authentic history of the tiara, though why the Montmartre artist claimed it as his own is one of the "games we do not understand." Anyhow 1903 is known to archæologists as "the year of the tiara."